

A Residential Treatment Centre

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Delinquent acts are only symptoms of deeper stresses.
... *from General Secretary's Report, Annual Meeting 1945*



In their ongoing concern about the obvious need to provide more services for the increasing numbers of troubled youth throughout Metropolitan Toronto, the Board of Directors, in 1968, authorized a service policy sub-committee to assess overall youth needs. Because some anxiety existed in the minds of certain members around the wisdom of offering their agency's comprehensive, in-depth service to the limited number of girls it was possible to serve, when so many others might be helped through a more casual, less costly service, the sub-committee's

direction was clear. The ten volunteers who formed the committee would pinpoint those needs specifically within the scope of the Big Sister Counselling Service, list them in order of urgency, and recommend service extension priorities to the Board. A period of intensive study and research included interviews with key personnel in 25 other agencies providing several kinds of service to youth. To the women who participated in the study, the willingness of key people in other agencies to discuss their problems and experiences frankly, was indication of the gravity of the existing situation. In November 1970 a report known as *The Robinson Report* was presented to, and unanimously approved by the Board of Directors.

Recommendations contained in the report included —

- (a) A second therapeutic residence facility
- (b) Continuation of a service programme instituted in June 1969, for 12 to 15 year old girls, in which the skills of a community college graduate in social services were used successfully, and further extension of it through employment of a second community college graduate.
- (c) Provision of more adequate temporary shelter
- (d) Appointment of a volunteer committee to investigate and pinpoint youth needs in each of the suburbs, and determine the extent of the need for both counselling and temporary shelter. Immediate planning for extension of service into the suburban area having the greatest need for youth services.
- (e) An ongoing plan of publicity for interpretation of the total programme offered by the Big Sister Counselling Service.
- (f) Service information more readily available to young people.
- (g) Cooperation by Big Sisters in furthering the coordination of services in the community in the interests of the client, and as a measure of economy.
- (h) Exploration of the feasibility of changing the name of the counselling service to a title more appropriate for the programme offered.

A change in the incorporated name, Big Sister Association of Metropolitan Toronto, was not proposed. It was felt that an organization which for more than 50 years had promoted the welfare of youth had achieved considerable strength that should not be lost.

While recording their findings prior to compilation of the statement, the committee discussed ways and means of meeting some of the serious needs. The report included a statement that if sufficient funds and qualified staff could be made available, the Big Sister Association should, ideally, establish "a coeducational youth counselling centre, with a centralized core of experts, and satellite units decentralized, for seriously troubled young people, and those with less difficult problems". It would be a youth centre offering several kinds of counselling, about jobs and careers as well as serious personal problems, a centre complete with group home service, temporary and emergency shelter. In addition, it was agreed that a satellite counselling centre,

with temporary shelter housed under one roof, should be set up in each of the suburbs in which the need was proven.

At about the time the Robinson Committee began its study, members of the Board of St. Faith's Lodge met with the Board of the Big Sister Association to discuss a proposal for disposition of the funds St. Faith's Board would receive from the province for the Warrendale property. St. Faith's was the agency which had operated the Warrendale institution for emotionally disturbed children at Newmarket, Ontario, prior to its takeover by the provincial government. If carried out, the St. Faith's proposal would provide the Big Sister Association with funds to further extend their service through the establishment of the second residential facility recommended later on in the Robinson report. From the beginning, Big Sisters have maintained that funds for worthy projects would be forthcoming if sufficient numbers of people could become interested or involved in the undertakings of the Association. The St. Faith's proposal further confirmed their belief.

In their meetings with Big Sisters, members of the Board of St. Faith's Lodge expressed the wish to use the Warrendale funds held in trust by the Province of Ontario "to provide a programme that would give supportive residential care to girls over 16 years of age". In their discussions with the provincial minister of Family and Social Services it was agreed that St. Faith's could provide a service in collaboration with either the Big Sister Association or the Y.W.C. A. of Metropolitan Toronto. Before relinquishing the funds the Ontario government required, from the agency chosen, a detailed statement of a proposal that would be acceptable under the appropriate legislation.

Big Sister plans for a second residential facility were immediately outlined in a brief presented to both the provincial government and the Board of St. Faith's. In November 1968, the Association was advised that the St. Faith's Board had passed a resolution to ask the Province of Ontario to approve the division between the Y.W.C.A. and the Big Sister Association of Metropolitan Toronto, of the assets of their Board for the purpose of opening a residence, contingent on government approval of the plans submitted. The Association's share of the funds would be approximately \$150,000.00.

Mrs. John H. Osler, president of the Board of St. Faith's Lodge met with the Board of Directors of the Big Sister Association in September 1970 to present them with the largest single donation the Association had ever received. In her remarks, Mrs. Osler informed the Big Sisters that when the provincial government assumed responsibility for the operation of Warrendale, their Board expressed a desire to retrieve the private funds invested in the Treatment Centre. It was their feeling that such funds should remain in the private sector of the welfare field. Officials of the provincial government agreed. In studying community needs, members of their Board recognized a lack of residential care for girls over 16, and decided to strengthen the work of the

agencies they felt had been most successful in that particular field of service, the Y. W.C. A. of Metropolitan Toronto and the Big Sister Association. Fully aware of the responsibility they assumed in guaranteeing the operation of a new therapeutic residential facility, the Big Sisters accepted St. Faith's gift. It would mean an increase in both caseload and counselling staff. New sources of financial support would be needed to ensure ongoing operation.

Although the proposed second residence was given extension priority, other recommendations were implemented before it became a reality. Outreach programmes were in progress in some areas as the need for a suburban satellite unit was studied. And in 1975 the Big Sisters were again assessing the quality of the service and the strength of the Association while discussing a new five year plan for service extension.

Negotiations with the provincial government in regard to funding, consultations with the appropriate department of the Children's Branch of the Ministry of Welfare, the decision to rent, temporarily, until sufficient extra dollars could be found to purchase or build a facility, the difficulty in locating a suitable house were stumbling blocks that delayed the opening of the second residence until January 1974.

The need for the second residence was so pressing by June 1972 that Big Sisters felt they must provide some service quickly. With the approval of the provincial Department of Community and Social Services, they searched for and found a house at 204 St. Clair Avenue West, used previously as a nursing home. The building seemed well suited to their purpose, and although no lease was signed, a rental was paid in order to reserve it while details of the transaction were resolved. The difficulties of financing posed real problems for the Big Sisters. Because of the degree of emotional disturbance anticipated in the girls who would be placed there, the carefully calculated per diem rate was higher than allowed by the Department of Community and Social Services for operation, and would create a maintenance deficit larger than could be carried by the Association. Eventually, because the treatment oriented programme envisaged would require more skilled staff to care for the girls who would live there, the plan was approved for acceptance under the Children's Mental Health Centres Act. Assured that they would receive 100 percent of the operating costs of the facility through the Children's Services Branch of the Ministry of Health from 1 April 1974, the Board of Directors made plans to open their residential treatment centre early in the new year. A lease was secured on the 204 St. Clair Avenue West property, and the necessary renovations were begun.

On 14 January 1974, nine confused and bewildered girls in the 11 to 15 year age group moved in. The house was warm and welcoming. The rooms were fresh with new paint. Bright curtains hung at the windows. Appetizing smells emanated from the kitchen while young, understanding child care workers helped their charges settle into their rooms and feel comfortable in the strange surroundings. Eighteen months later, in August 1975, the Big Sisters were able to use the funds

received in 1970 from the Board of St. Faith's Lodge, supplemented by money from other sources, to purchase and equip an appropriate house at 12 Maynard Avenue. It would replace the St. Clair Avenue facility as a residential treatment centre. Certain necessary changes in construction were made, and under the direction of a volunteer committee the kitchen was equipped, renovations completed while a tolerant landlord agreed to extend the lease on the rented house until the new one was ready for occupancy. The girls moved to 12 Maynard Avenue in June 1976.



Maynard - Big Sister Association Residential Treatment Centre for girls 11 - 15, formally opened September 1976

An Open House reception was held for Big Sisters and their friends, members of the Board of St. Faith's, and representatives from other agencies on an afternoon in September. Through the western windows, the sun cast a golden light over the walls and furnishings as the visitors toured the rooms. They sipped tea, nibbled on home-made cookies, chatted with friends and members of the staff, and were enthusiastic in their praise of the warmly welcoming setting that had been created. With members of the child care staff standing by to lend support, one or two girls in

residence felt comfortable enough among the guests to sit at the dining-room table, pour careful cups of tea, and stare, round-eyed, at the ladies who came and went throughout the afternoon. Members of the Board who were present to greet the visitors, and answer their questions, felt a sense of achievement in having provided a permanent home for their Children's Treatment Centre. There was, too, a certain humbleness in their hearts, and a feeling of gratitude to the many friends of the Association who had made accomplishment of the project possible.

Source: Robinson, Helen Caister, *Decades of Caring: The Big Sister Story*, Dundurn, 1979, pp. 123-128